IN THE CLAIMS

*The status of the claims as* presently *amended is as follows:*

1. (*Currently Amended*)  An image search apparatus comprising:

referring means for referring to a keyword table in a memory,

wherein the keyword table includes a plurality of keywords associated with ~~that corresponds to~~ a plurality of different images, ~~and~~

wherein at least one of the plurality of different images is associated with at least two of the keywords having different levels of importance with respect to the one image,

wherein at least one of the at least two keywords associated with the one image also is associated with at least another of the plurality of different images, and

wherein the one keyword has a plurality of levels of importance ~~of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different images~~ so that the one keyword has one level of importance associated with the one image and another level of importance associated with the another image;

search means for searching said plurality of different images according to an input search query related to the one keyword;

acquiring means for acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the one keyword based on the images searched by said search means; and

output means for outputting said plurality of images searched by said search means in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the one keyword acquired by said acquiring means.


2. (*Currently Amended*)  An image search apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said output means outputs said plurality of images according to a standard level of importance of a default when said plurality of levels of importance are not stored in relation to ~~the keywords~~ a keyword of said plurality of keywords.


3. (*Currently Amended*)  An image search apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said acquiring means acquires a level of accordance between at least one synonym of ~~said~~ a keyword of said plurality of keywords and said input search query and said output means outputs said plurality of images searched by said search means in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword acquired by said acquiring means and said level of accordance acquired by said acquiring means.

4-5. (*Canceled*)

6. (*Previously Presented*)  An image search apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said image search apparatus is provided in a server of an information retrieval system on the Internet, an input means receiving a search query inputted from a WWW browser of a client of said information retrieval system on the Internet, said output means outputting said plurality of images searched by said search means in a predetermined format, which includes HTML and XML, to said client in said order.

7. (*Currently Amended*)  An image search method applied to an image search apparatus comprising:

a referring step of referring to a keyword table in a memory,

wherein the keyword table includes a plurality of keywords associated with ~~that corresponds to~~ a plurality of different images, ~~and~~

wherein at least one of the plurality of different images is associated with at least two of the keywords having different levels of importance with respect to the one image,

wherein at least one of the at least two keywords associated with the one image also is associated with at least another of the plurality of different images, and

wherein the one keyword has a plurality of levels of importance ~~of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different images~~ so that the one keyword has one level of importance associated with the one image and another level of importance associated with the another image;

a searching step of searching said plurality of different images according to an input search query related to the one keyword;

an acquiring step of acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the one keyword based on the images searched by said searching step; and

an output step of outputting said plurality of images searched by said searching step in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the one keyword acquired by said acquiring step.

8. (*Currently Amended*) An image search method according to claim 7, wherein said plurality of images are output according to a standard level of importance of a default when said plurality of levels of importance are not stored in relation to ~~the~~ a keyword of said plurality of keywords.

9. (*Currently Amended*) An image search method according to claim 7, wherein a level of accordance between at least one synonym of ~~said~~ a keyword of said plurality of keywords and said input search query is acquired and said plurality of images are output, said plurality of images searched by said searching step in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword acquired by said acquiring step and said level of accordance acquired by said acquiring step.

10-11. (*Canceled*)

12. (*Previously Presented*) An image search method according to claim 7, wherein an input step comprises receiving a search query inputted from a WWW browser of a client of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said output step outputting said plurality of images searched by said searching step in a predetermined format, which includes HTML and XML, to said client in said order.

13. (*Currently Amended*) A storage medium ~~that can be~~ read~~able~~ by a computer and stores a program for executing an image search applied to an image search apparatus, the program comprising instructions for:

referring to a keyword table in a memory,

wherein the keyword table includes a plurality of keyword~~s~~ associated with ~~that corresponds to~~ a plurality of different images, ~~and~~

wherein at least one of the plurality of different images is associated with at least two of the keywords having different levels of importance with respect to the one image,

wherein at least one of the at least two keywords associated with the one image also is associated with at least another of the plurality of different images, and

wherein the one keyword has a plurality of levels of importance ~~of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different images~~ so that the one keyword has one level of importance associated with the one image and another level of importance associated with the another image;

searching said plurality of different images according to an input search query related to the one keyword;

acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the one keyword based on the images searched by said searching instruction; and

outputting said plurality of images searched by said searching instruction in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the one keyword acquired by said acquiring instruction.

14. (*Currently Amended*)  A storage medium according to claim 13, wherein said plurality of image data images are output according to a standard level of importance of a default when said plurality of levels of importance are not stored in relation to the a keyword of said plurality of keywords.

15. (*Currently Amended*)  A storage medium according to claim 13, wherein a level of accordance between at least one synonym of said a keyword of said plurality of keywords and said input search query is acquired and said plurality of images are output, said plurality of images searched by said searching instruction in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the keyword and said level of accordance.

16-17. (*Canceled*)

18. (*Previously Presented*)  A storage medium according to claim 13, wherein an input instruction comprises receiving a search query inputted from a WWW browser of a client of an information retrieval system on the Internet, said output instruction outputting said plurality of images searched by said searching instruction in a predetermined format, which includes HTML and XML, to said client in said order.

19. (*Currently Amended*)  A contents search apparatus comprising:

referring means for referring to a keyword table in a memory,

wherein the keyword table includes a plurality of keywords associated with that corresponds to a plurality of different contents, and

wherein at least one of the plurality of different contents is associated with at least two of the keywords having different levels of importance with respect to the one content,

wherein at least one of the at least two keywords associated with the one content also is associated with at least another of the plurality of different contents, and

wherein the one keyword has a plurality of levels of importance ~~of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different images~~ so that the one keyword has one level of importance associated with the one content and another level of importance associated with the another content;

search means for searching said plurality of different contents according to an input search query related to the one keyword;

acquiring means for acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the one keyword based on the contents searched by said search means; and

output means for outputting said plurality of contents searched by said search means in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the one keyword acquired by said acquiring means.


20. (*Currently Amended*)  A computer-implemented contents search method applied to a contents search apparatus, the method comprising:

a referring step of referring to a keyword table in a memory,

wherein the keyword table includes a plurality of keywords associated with ~~that corresponds to~~ a plurality of different contents, ~~and~~

wherein at least one of the plurality of different contents is associated with at least two of the keywords having different levels of importance with respect to the one content,

wherein at least one of the at least two keywords associated with the one content also is associated with at least another of the plurality of different contents, and

wherein the one keyword has a plurality of levels of importance ~~of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different images~~ so that the one keyword has one level of importance associated with the one content and another level of importance associated with the another content;

a searching step of searching said plurality of different contents according to an input search query related to the one keyword;

an acquiring step of acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the one keyword based on the contents searched by said searching step; and

an output step of outputting said plurality of contents searched by said searching step in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the one keyword acquired by said acquiring step.


21. (*Currently Amended*)  A storage medium ~~that can be~~ read<u>able</u> by a computer and stores a program for executing a contents search applied to a contents search apparatus, the program comprising instructions for:

referring to a keyword table in a memory,

wherein the keyword table includes a <u>plurality of</u> keyword<u>s</u> <u>associated with</u> ~~that corresponds to~~ a plurality of different contents, ~~and~~

<u>wherein at least one of the plurality of different contents is associated with at least two of the keywords having different levels of importance with respect to the one content,</u>

<u>wherein at least one of the at least two keywords associated with the one content also is associated with at least another of the plurality of different contents, and</u>

<u>wherein the one keyword has</u> a plurality of levels of importance ~~of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different images~~ <u>so that the one keyword has one level of importance associated with the one content and another level of importance associated with the another content</u>;

searching said plurality of different contents according to an input search query related to the <u>one</u> keyword;

acquiring said plurality of levels of importance of the <u>one</u> keyword based on the contents searched by said searching instruction; and

outputting said plurality of contents searched by said searching instruction in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the <u>one</u> keyword acquired by said acquiring instruction.


22. (*Currently Amended*)  An image search apparatus comprising:

referring device that refers to a keyword table in a memory,

wherein the keyword table includes a <u>plurality of</u> keyword<u>s</u> <u>associated with</u> ~~that corresponds to~~ a plurality of different images, ~~and~~

<u>wherein at least one of the plurality of different images is associated with at least two of the keywords having different levels of importance with respect to the one image,</u>

wherein at least one of the at least two keywords associated with the one image also is associated with at least another of the plurality of different images, and

wherein the one keyword has a plurality of levels of importance ~~of the keyword with respect to said plurality of different images~~ so that the one keyword has one level of importance associated with the one image and another level of importance associated with the another image;

search device that searches said plurality of different images according to an input search query related to the one keyword;

acquiring device that acquires said plurality of levels of importance of the one keyword based on the images searched by said search device; and

output device that outputs said plurality of images searched by said search device in an order according to said plurality of levels of importance of the one keyword acquired by said acquiring device.